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The Eye of a Needle :

Commemorating the ‘Godly Merchant’ in the Early Modern Funeral Sermon

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This investigation contributes to a much larger ongoing study of the early modern Protestant funeral sermon which considers the genre’s origins and its surprising popularity during print culture’s rapid expansion. Subjects for these works range from anonymous infants to the nation’s monarch, as well as a host of ‘ordinary’ individuals often characterised, on the text’s title page, by their profession.¹ While approximately half of several thousand extant funeral sermons from this period commemorate deceased ministers and their wives, a significant proportion acknowledge other professions, most notably doctors, the military, and merchants.²

¹ On the early modern published funeral sermon, see Ralph Houlbrooke’s chapter entitled ‘The Age of Decency: 1660-1760’ in *Death in England : An Illustrated History*, Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings, eds. (Manchester, 1999), pp187ff. See also Penny Pritchard’s chapter entitled ‘The Protestant Funeral Sermon in England, 1688-1800’ in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, Keith A. Francis and William Gibson, eds. (Oxford: 2012), pp322-337. Julien Litten reviews post-Reformation liturgical reforms to burial services in *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: 1991), pp151-8.

² Calculation of precise numbers of published funeral sermons remains notoriously difficult, not least because of the widespread practice of anthologising ministers’ ‘collected works’, reprints under different titles, or reworking of texts to commemorate different deceased

This last cohort presents particular challenges for ministers seeking to endorse the spiritual conduct of those whose earthly success is defined by material profit. This article's title alludes to Matthew 19:24, the Scriptural text most frequently associated with the difficulty of salvation faced by men who possess material wealth ('And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God'). The full meaning of this text, however, encompassing the passage through to Matthew 19:26, relates to God's infinite capacity to achieve what is otherwise impossible, and thus implicitly guarantees at least the potential of salvation for those possessing earthly riches.³ By this principle, at least, the soteriological concerns of England's Protestant merchants appear to be hampered less by Biblical doctrine than they are by increased cultural scrutiny of their moral conduct during the early modern period. There is no doubt that truly profound questions about how the acquisition of wealth might be reconciled with spiritual content in Protestant early modern England, most famously posed by Max Weber more than a century ago, become a more urgent cultural concern in the wake of growing mercantile activity. Such

subjects. Though hardly definitive, approximate numbers may be derived from strategic searches on *Early English Books Online/Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (forthwith *EEBO/ECCO*). Using the search-term 'funeral sermon' under category 'All' for the chronological period 1660-1800, the combined databases yield 6,628 titles whereas 'funeral sermon' searched under the category 'Title' yields only 1,101 titles for the same period. Using 'funeral' and 'sermon' to search under the respective categories of 'title' and 'genre' yields 205 titles for the same period.

³ Also cited in King James Version Mark 10:23-7 and Luke 18:25-7. Matthew Henry comments, 'with God all things are possible. This is a great truth in general, that God is able to do that which exceeds all created power; that nothing is too hard for God, Genesis 18:14; Numbers 11:23.'

questions continue to shape our understanding of the history and also the literary culture of this period, though they remain subject to scholarly debate beyond the remit of this discussion.⁴ That said, the opening of Weber's important fifth chapter, 'Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism', usefully stresses the influence of both clergy *and* (theological) texts, as well as associated cultural practices and rituals, on the social construction of the English national character:

In order to comprehend the connection between the basic religious ideas of ascetic Protestantism and the maxims of everyday economic life, it is necessary above all to draw upon those theological texts that can be recognized as having crystallized out of the practice of pastoral care. In this [sixteenth- and seventeenth-century] epoch, everything depended upon admission to the sacrament of communion. Moreover, through pastoral care, church discipline, and preaching, the clergy's influence grew to such an extent – as any glance in the collected *consillia*, *casus conscientiae*, and other documents will indicate – that we today are *simply no longer* capable of understanding its broad scope. Religious forces, as they became transmitted to populations through

⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York and Oxford: 2011). Two excellent sources which briefly summarise key aspects of the Weberian debate include the chapter entitled 'An Active Frame in Courts Below' in Matthew Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier : The Life of an Eighteenth-Century Protestant Capitalist* (New Haven and London: 2013, pp84-10; Patrick Collinson, 'Religion, Society, and the Historian' in *The Journal of Religious History* 23:2 (June 1999), 149-168.

these regular practices and became legitimate and accepted, were decisive for the formation of “national character.”⁵

It is with acknowledgement of this powerful, if cautiously broad, textual influence – as well as the Weberian concept of ‘elective affinity’ as usefully defined and endorsed by Patrick Collinson, among others - that I justify my approach here in interpreting interactions between prevailing religious beliefs in early modern England and contemporary social activities such as the impact of print culture through popular religious writing.⁶ This investigation therefore makes a tacit assumption that selective cross-influences may be recognised across the Protestant faith(s) of the minister-authors whose works are considered here, and their conscious participation in contemporary print culture – in its broadest sense – as discernible in published funeral sermons. The cultural status of the early modern merchant, though subject to substantial scholarly consideration for some time, merits further juxtaposition against the contemporary context of an increasingly self-regarding print culture whose ascendancy paralleled the period’s economic expansion on both a European and global scale, and with it, a growing social category of merchants and other capitalists actively engaged in its pursuit.

One justification for this investigation’s consideration of a hitherto relatively neglected genre of popular religious print, then, is to determine whether evidence from published funeral sermons reinforces or remains distinct from what other contemporary forms

⁵ Weber, p158.

⁶ Weber, and Collinson, op cit., pp165ff.

of print describe concerning what I will call ‘mercantile conduct’. This is intended to refer to print descriptions of the moral, spiritual, and (where relevant) commercial behaviour of men engaged in mercantile trade throughout the latter seventeenth and eighteenth-century period, both in terms of fictional and ‘authentic’ portraits. No comparative distinction will be made, here, between Protestant sects or denominations, given the very broad array of doctrinal and sectarian positions upheld both within and outside of the established Church throughout this period. Economic factors which categorise merchants, such as ‘wealth’ or sectors of trading activity, are also less of a concern here than more universal principles of mercantile conduct such as moral integrity or diligence. This notwithstanding, it should be acknowledged, as Ralph Houlbrooke has observed concerning the preaching of early modern funeral sermons, that such public services of commemoration ‘usually had to be paid for. Most of the poor probably went to their graves without them.’⁷ It is more than likely that the extant funeral sermons considered here, possessing too the further distinction of publication, commemorate merchants who experienced no small degree of material success in their lifetimes.⁸

In blurring the religious or economic sub-categories between Protestant merchants commemorated in published funeral sermons, the main intention is to consider how contemporary descriptions of early modern mercantile conduct in print – even if they tell us very little about individual merchants – help us to understand what sort of cultural

⁷ Houlbrooke, p188.

⁸ Direct reference to the deceased’s material success in Protestant funeral sermons is, predictably, limited and purposely couched in obscure language. On this point, see F. Tromly, “‘According to sound religion’: the Elizabethan controversy over the funeral sermon’ in *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13 (1983), 293-312.

expectations were associated with the figure of the ‘godly merchant’ in early modern England at the time when popular print culture began to play an increasingly important role in shaping those expectations. England’s rapid economic expansion, with London overtaking Amsterdam as the commercial centre of Europe by the early eighteenth century, provides some justification for increased cultural scrutiny of mercantile conduct in this period.⁹ A significant proportion of the literary record further supports the Biblical claim, made above, that mercantile conduct *can* be wholly compatible with Christian virtues – in particular, through diligence, regular habits, abstention, and generous philanthropy. In conduct works such as *The character and qualification of an Honest Loyal Merchant* (1686) or *A Letter from an Old Merchant to his Son* (1753), or as demonstrated in the very letter and example of *Family-Prayers and Moral Essays in Prose and Verse, by a Merchant* (1769), the uncomplicated marriage of Christian and mercantile interests is readily apparent.

A clear delineation needs to be made between those literary works of the late seventeenth century which praise, sometimes unquestioningly, the endeavours of an emerging mercantile class and works which interrogate specifically Christian virtues most readily associated with those endeavours. The previous category is often recognised in relation to prominent Royal Society members whose agenda encompassed mercantile endeavour in relation to a much wider ‘project’ of social reform. John Evelyn’s celebration of merchants, for example, represents just one element of his and others’ much larger social project which, as John McVeagh points out, is

⁹ Perry Gauci, *Emporium of the World : The Merchants of London 1660-1800* (London and New York: 2007). See in particular his Preface and Chapters 1 and 2, pp1-36.

packed with descriptions and experiments, improvements, discoveries, mercantile activities, commercial projects, scientific pursuits, speculative attempts on the difficult or impossible for their own sake and for the good they may produce. All of these forms of endeavour are combined together as if Evelyn recognizes no basic difference between them; and this is indeed the case, for the spirit informing the personal record is purely Baconian[.]¹⁰

Some clear parallels exist between the Baconian recognition of mercantile endeavour and the 'godly merchant' to be investigated here, however, a useful contrast may be demonstrated by considering the relative insignificance of religious conduct in the former example versus the exemplary Christian conduct of Solomon, as definitively asserted in Defoe's *Complete English Tradesman* of 1726, when he observes that King Solomon was

certainly a friend to men of business, as it appears by his frequent good advice to them. In *Proverbs Chapter 18, verse 9*, he says, 'He that is slothful in business, is brother to him that is a great waster:' and in another place, 'The sluggard shall be clothed in rags,' (*Proverbs 22, verse 1*) ... the same wise man, by way of encouragement, tells them, 'The diligent hand maketh rich,' (*Proverbs 10, verse 4*), and, 'The diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be under tribute.'¹¹

¹⁰ John McVeagh, *Tradefull Merchants : The Portrayal of the Capitalist in Literature* (London: 1981), p45.

¹¹ Daniel Defoe, Letter V in *The Complete English Tradesman in Familiar Letters* [...] (London: 1726), pp55-6.

Here, Defoe's moral equation of diligent 'men of business' with godly followers of Solomon's 'good advice' illustrates a wholly unproblematic depiction of the Protestant work ethic.¹² A much earlier Solomonic parallel, endorsing idealised mercantile conduct, may be found in *Character and Qualification of an Honest Loyal Merchant* (1686), which defends not only the honourable status of the merchant as a role befitting even those of noble birth, but also seeks to describe Solomon's identity in terms which unite the economic activities and even geographical locations of mercantilism in biblical and contemporary times:

The Truth is, the wisest of Kings and Men has long since given his Judgement by his practice in this case; for Solomon himself could never have made Silver and Gold to be as plenteous in Jerusalem as Stones, and Cedars as Sycamores, if he had not first turned Merchant, join'd in Copartnership with King Hiram, and set out a Navy at Ezion Geher (a Port in the Red Sea) which had the Advantage of Traffic to the Indian Ocean, and from thence to Ophir (supposed to be the Isle of Madagascar) whence they brought Gold and Silver and Elephants Teeth, as well as Apes and Peacocks.¹³

¹² Defoe's fictional works further demonstrate cases where godly merchants or tradesmen happily resolve these dilemmas; see, for example, the master of apprentice Tom in Book Three of *The Family Instructor* (1722); Moll's final state of grace at the conclusion of *Moll Flanders* (1722), and Roxana's London financier in *Roxana* (1726).

¹³ Anonymous, *Character and Qualification of an Honest Loyal Merchant* (London: 1686), p12.

Solomon's precedent anticipates the successful and 'godly' merchant who happily resolves the moral challenges presented by the twin endeavours of capitalism and Christianity. Yet while the anonymous author of *Character and Qualification of an Honest Merchant* might share Defoe's Solomonic parallel, his agenda is neither precisely the same as that of Defoe's later conduct work, nor does it echo wholly those Royal Society projectors (such as John Evelyn or Thomas Sprat) who celebrate more widely the 'Baconian endeavours' of the age. In the first case, the author of *Character and Qualification* is more volubly defensive in tone than Defoe's later *Complete English Tradesmen* in championing the social status and 'Noble Mystery' of trade:

I intend [...] to vindicate the Honour of Merchandize, and convince the World, That if a Person of Quality should happen to breed up his Son, or Match a Daughter therein, there's no danger that they should presently be level'd with the common Crowd, or Numbred with the Gaffers and the Gamers. [...]

SURE I am, whatever low Conceits Aristotle or some other Pedants may have had of Merchandize in old times, when its Dignity was not known, and when indeed it was but Huckstering and Pedlary in respect of what it has since arriv'd to; it must be avow'd, That 'tis long since become not unworthy of Persons of first Quality [...]

TO go higher, some of the most sacred Crowned Heads of Christendom, descended from, and ally'd to the most Ancient and Illustrious Families that the World can boast of; (and in that number principally our present most August and Gracious Sovereign),

are so far from connting [sic] it any diminution to their Royal Majesties, That in the highest manner they endeavour to encourage Trade, by interesting Themselves therein.¹⁴

In the second case, the author of *Character and Qualification* also places his own views on the glories of trade in perspective to the earlier, though more recent, example of Royal Society discourses by quoting at length – while mildly expressing his own detachment from - a 1680 pamphlet which scorns the Baconian projectors with near-Swiftian relish:

‘Tis a smart, but I hope, causeless Reflection of a late Ingenious (*) Author. “We are (says he) still pretending to be more Acurate in Logick and Philosophy (which however otherwise useful, do not add Twopence per Annum to the Riches of the Nation) we continue to squeeze all the Sapless Papers and Fragments of Antiquity; we grow mighty well acquainted with the old Heathen gods, Towns, and People; we prise [sic] our selves in fruitless curiosities; we turn our Lice and Fleas into Bulls and Pigs by our Magnifying Glasses; we are searching for the world in the Moon with our Telescopes; we send to weight the Air on the top of Teneriff; we invent Pacing Saddles, and Gimcracks of all sorts, which are voted Ingenuities, whilst the solid and most useful Notions and Considerations of Trade, are turned into a Ridicule, or out of Fashion.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid, pp10-12.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp10-11. The work cited therein is William Peyt’s anonymously-attributed *Britannia Languens, or a Discourse of Trade* [...] (London: 1680).

Though the author of *Character and Qualification* does make a modest effort to preface this lengthy extract with his hope that such observations are ‘causeless’, it is less clear whether, in doing so, he seeks to distance himself from its mockery of ‘fruitless curiosities’ and ‘Gimcracks’ of scientific invention, or from its expression of vexed frustration that contemporary ridicule is being levelled at trade, or both. Whatever the case, his position is not identical to that of the Royal Society, and is instead far more dedicated to an idealisation of the figure of the merchant himself as both godly and prosperous, and wholly reconciled in these features. Such figures remain more culturally familiar in idealised and fictional forms than in contemporary extant accounts of ‘authentic’ godly merchants whose lives are self-documented. As Matthew Kadane observes in the 2013 introduction to his exploration of the spiritual diary of prosperous Leeds cloth merchant Joseph Ryder,

[w]e still know less than we should, however, about the birth pangs of modern capitalism felt by the pious people whose commerce and labor brought it about. In a history rich with images of titans and victims of the market, and celebrants and skeptics of consumerism, the obscure figure is the godly entrepreneur on the cusp of industrialization, wrestling with the moral meaning of unknown economic opportunity.¹⁶

The scope to research the lived experience of tradesmen such as Joseph Ryder through their spiritual diaries remains challenging for many reasons (as Kadane outlines), not least of which are the cultural currency of autobiographical writing in this period and – in tandem

¹⁶ Kadane, p1.

with this - the extent to which such forms of writing present the subject as unique yet, at the same time, an everyman suited to strategic cultural analysis.¹⁷ Notwithstanding these challenges, as well as some very important scholarly discussions surrounding the extent to which such diaries were intended both for posterity and the writer's private reflection, spiritual autobiographies and diaries necessarily offer the reader a self-fashioned portrait of a living subject.¹⁸ The published funeral sermon, then, sits squarely between these genres of literary idealisation and spiritual autobiography; it commemorates an authentic subject externally depicted but competes, in the early modern period, for a readership whose taste for popular religious literature may well have encompassed all of these categories and may not have necessarily distinguished readily between fictional versus non-fictional versions of the merchants they encountered there.

As such, this investigation suggests an alternative and problematized cultural portrait of the early modern 'godly merchant' which also looks to literary precedents for comparative analysis. The literary record is profoundly ambivalent. Despite extensive acknowledgement of Defoe's and other positive examples in the early decades of the eighteenth century, John McVeagh has summarised the post-Restoration literary portrait of the merchant, particularly

¹⁷ Ibid, pp1-3 and pp6-14. Here and throughout his text, Kadane offers a comprehensive discussion of past and recent scholarship on the early modern spiritual autobiography.

¹⁸ Ibid, Chapter 1. See also Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World : A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford: 1985) regarding the complex dual purpose of spiritual diaries (for private use and posterity) but see also Kadane, pp86-7, on the extent to which Joseph Ryder presents Weber's (necessarily externally-realised) 'ideal-typical Protestant capitalist.'

in terms of drama, as both largely negative and indifferent. This can be seen not only in the ‘comic rather than menacing aspects of those such as vulgar tradesmen’ but also the calculated materialism of Wycherley’s merchants. It is only Dryden, notes McVeagh, who offers an ‘altogether more complicated response to the whole issue of capitalist growth’ and though still largely a negative one, he

could at times share in the mercantile ebullience which he also criticised in its grosser aspect, and well represents in his variations of theme and emphasis over forty years, despite his lack of enthusiasm for what it was becoming, a shifting society striking out for itself new necessary valuations all the time. Perhaps for Dryden the old ones were being let too casually slip out of respect; but he is engaged with, not withdrawn from a nation not yet settled into that commercialized, acquisitive, imperialist role which was to be its character for the ensuing two and a half centuries and more.¹⁹

If the post-Restoration merchant in drama represents a largely nostalgic and gloomy Tory outlook on the imminent arrival of that ‘commercialized, acquisitive, imperialist’ national role, much less frequently are ‘real’ merchants openly castigated in print for either moral or religious misconduct in the period contemporary with all the works in this estimation considered by McVeagh. Theatrical portraits are clearly not the same as commemorative representations of deceased people, notwithstanding the fluid nature of boundaries between different textual genres in the early modern period. Nevertheless, an equally if different type

¹⁹ John McVeagh, *Tradefull Merchants : The Portrayal of the Capitalist in Literature* (London: 1981), p36.

of ambiguity is discernible in merchants' funeral sermons, though as often as not this results from what has been omitted from the commemorative portrait of the deceased merchant. The real possibility of cross-influence from literary examples of merchants is unsurprising, given the fact that published funeral sermons competed with many other types of literature, for popular recognition, from a burgeoning readership who invested rather less in distinguishing between genres than they did in discerning useful didactic content from them. In early works of prose fiction such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or *The Family Instructor*, the didactic value of such writing is unquestionably part of how they are presented to the reading public. As much is apparent in the manner of which such texts were prefaced :

we live in an age that does not want so much to know their duty as to practice it; not so much to be taught, as to be made obedient to what they have already learnt... The way I have taken for this, is entirely New, and at first perhaps it may appear something Odd, and the Method may be contemned; But let such blame their own more irregular Tempers, that must have every thing turned into new Models; must be touch'd with Novelty, and have their Fancies humour'd with the Dress of a Thing; so that if it be what has been said over and over a thousand times, yet if it has but a different colour'd Coat, or a new Feather in its Cap, it pleases and wins upon them, whereas the same Truths written in the divinest Stile in the World, would be flat, stale and unpleasant without it.²⁰

²⁰ Daniel Defoe, Introduction to *The Family Instructor*, Volume One. A Facsimile Reproduction, edited by Paula Backscheider (Delmar, New York: 1989), pp.2-3.

The cultural influence of the published funeral sermon was on the wane by the time that later works of extended prose fiction began to assume their popular ascendancy as ‘novels’. Carol Stewart has even gone so far as to suggest that ‘the idea particular novels, if not the novel as a genre, could promote morality in a way that sermons failed to do was beginning to take hold in the mid-eighteenth century’, but even if this is the case, the strongly comparative nature of her observation points to the cultural overlap between sermon literature (including published funeral sermons) and the growing moral influence of didactic works of prose fiction in tandem with their growing popularity.²¹ It can come as no surprise that readers and congregations would likewise carry their tastes for ‘entertaining’ as well as ‘improving’ content to their reading of contemporary funeral sermons, particularly as they concern the matter of depicting the deceased’s moral and spiritual integrity. Ralph Houlbrooke asserts as much, noting also the implicit challenges this scrutiny posed for the presiding minister:

The last part of the [funeral] sermon, in which it was customary to describe the character of the dead person, was awaited with the keenest anticipation. The preacher’s task was clearly a delicate one. But by carefully selecting what was good from the life’s record, and drawing a veil over the rest, he might usually satisfy the expectations of his audience without violating his own conscience. In many cases, clergy went further, emphasising the grounds for hope of a happy outcome, or even expressing confidence that the deceased had entered a better world.²²

²¹ Carol Stewart, *The Eighteenth-Century Novel and the Secularization of Ethics* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: 2010), p1.

²² Houlbrooke, p188.

Houlbrooke's reference to how ministers attempted to strike a balance between 'what was good from the life's record, and 'drawing a veil over the rest' offers one aspect of how such ministers convey mercantile conduct in contemporary funeral sermons. In short, they attempt to offer a proportional balance of merchants' active versus passive Christian virtues. Active virtues include hard work, an enquiring mind, and brotherly love as exemplified through charitable acts or work in the community. In 1753, the Old Merchant exhorts his son to active pursuit of knowledge through the study of a wide spectrum of improving literature, both secular and spiritual:

Read History and natural Philosophy at your leisure Hours, that you may know GOD and Man by their Works. Read the Old *Whole Duty of Man*, that you may know, and govern yourself. Above all read the Scriptures ... Read the Prophet Isaiah, and compare him with the History of Christ, that you may see the Conformity between the divine Foreknowledge and the Facts in which we are so deeply concerned [...] Read the Psalms that your Heart may be warmed with true Devotion ... Let the New Testament be ever in your Hands, that you may know, and well consider, on what Terms Salvation is promised.²³

This advice is preceded, however, with plentiful admonitions to the Old Merchant's son to refrain from sinful practices and company, thus tempering active virtues with those of passive abstinence :

²³ Anonymous, *A Letter from an Old Merchant to his Son* (Dublin: 1753), pp17-8.

When you go into Company, be not assuming; be not first to give your Opinion, nor positive ... Let not the Atheist, the Deist, or the Libertine, whether in Principle or Practice, be among your Intimates. If sometimes you are obliged to meet them over a Bottle, guard against that and them, with a like Abhorrence to Intoxication.²⁴

Nearly seventy years prior to the publication of the *Letter from an Old Merchant to his Son*, the author of *The character and qualification of an honest loyal merchant* had celebrated in no uncertain terms the merchant's *active*, indeed Providential, virtues as a missionary and global peacemaker :

Without [the Merchant] the world would still be a kind of Wilderness, one part unknown and unbeholding to the other; and if ever its remote Inhabitants met, it would be rather for mischief or slaughter ... whereas his part unites divided Empires, and those that never beheld the same Stars; joins people separated by different Climates, Religions, and Policies, into one common Society ... Nay, further, there seems yet a more sublime and mysterious designment of Providence attending his pains; for by establishing an intercourse with Infidels for Civil Traffick, a door is not seldom open'd to advance the Divine Interest; so that he may propagate our most Holy Faith, as well as end our Temporal Commodities[.]²⁵

²⁴ Ibid, pp15-6.

²⁵ *Character and Qualification of an Honest Loyal Merchant*, pp2-3.

Yet even this dynamic and godly figure of mercantile agency also encompasses the accompanying *passive* virtue of honesty, since the virtuous Merchant would also

rather endure the Rack himself, than stretch a Piece of Cloath on the Tenters to make it three or four Yards longer, which then fold to a Turk, shall in the next Shower, Cockle all up in a Ruck causing the honest *Musulman* to revile both the cheating Christian and his Religion [...]²⁶

This idealised balance of active and passive Christian mercantile virtues is not merely a literary motif; Perry Gauci describes a similar balance in ‘the common code of conduct’ for City of London merchants in the international context when he observes that

the [mercantile] profession had historically promoted personal values which reflected the priorities of the business world. If any common code of conduct was maintained within trading circles, it centred on the virtues of industry, reliability, punctuality, thrift and good faith ... advised for many other walks of life, ...they gained a particular significance when so much of international business hinged on the maintenance of trust. Private records suggest that within the City [of London] these attributes were not taken lightly, and any loss of respect on these grounds, whether by the trader himself or any of his circle, spelt serious difficulty for the business.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid, p3.

²⁷ Gauci, p101.

Balancing active and passive Christian virtues had long been discerned by City merchants as *pragmatic*, representing what Gauci goes on to describe as ‘a general code of business behaviour vital to both individual and collective success... [since] the inherent self-interest in the maintenance of these basic principles of good conduct... in turn instilled a common outlook to the dealing world as a whole.’²⁸ The moral reconciliation of mercantile conduct with Christian virtue appears eminently possible, it seems, as reflected by the (secular) historical record.

Given this array of textual portraits of the early modern merchant – whether castigated by Wycherley, celebrated by Waller and Defoe, or idealised as possessing a balance of passive and active virtues in works of moral and religious instruction – and reinforced by Gauci’s evidence of the pragmatic interests of actual merchants in this period, readers might reasonably expect something similar in merchants’ contemporary funeral sermons. They would be disappointed on several fronts. Conspicuous by their absence, extraordinarily few published funeral sermons openly commemorate merchants as their subject during the early modern period.²⁹ This is not to suggest that merchants rarely received

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Further exploratory searches on EEBO/ECCO offer a broad indication of the extant print record. Using the term ‘merchant’ under the search category of ‘title’ and ‘funeral’ under either ‘subject’ or ‘genre’ returned 22 hits for all texts on the databases (covering, in total, the chronological period 1473-1800). While a search employing ‘merchant’ under the category ‘title’ and ‘funeral’ under the broader ‘all’ search category produced 128 hits, these texts

funeral sermons. Either very few published examples survive (though this seems unlikely given the significant extant presence of other professions mentioned on funeral sermons' titles pages) or, alternatively, the mercantile identity of the deceased was rarely, openly, promoted.

The same chronological period covered by this investigation witnesses, comparatively, as least as many if not more published funeral sermons for merchants' wives. These include Thomas Brooks' highly popular and oft-reprinted *A string of pearls*, a funeral sermon ostensibly commemorating Mary Blake, printed in least ten separate editions between 1657 and 1684, as well as Joseph Hill's *The Providence of God in Sudden Death* (a funeral sermon for Mary Reve) published in Rotterdam in 1685, Edmund Batson's 1700 funeral sermon for Mary Paice and Boston minister Charles Chauncy's funeral sermon for Lucy Waldo in 1741.³⁰ Published funeral sermons for the most successful English merchants are in

include plays with the title 'Merchant' in them or sermons preached before the Merchant-Taylors School.

³⁰ Thomas Brooks, *A String of Pearles: or, The best things reservd till last [...]* (London: 1657); Joseph Hill, *The Providence of God in sudden Death ordinary and extraordinary vindicated and improved [...]* (Rotterdam: 1685); Edmund Batson, *A funeral sermon on the death of Mrs. Mary Paice, late wife of Mr. Joseph Paice Merchant of Clapham [...]* (London: 1700); Charles Chauncy, *A Funeral Discourse on the Death of Mrs. Lucy Waldo, The amiable Consort of Mr. Samuel Waldo, Merchant in Boston [...]* (Boston: 1741). The prevalence of early modern published funeral sermons for the wives of eminent or high-profile individuals merits separate investigation; on the topic of typologies of subject in funeral sermons, see forthcoming chapter by Penny Pritchard entitled 'Speaking Well of the

truth very rare, even in the case of merchants notable for public activities beyond trade. Neither Daniel Colwall, for example, founder and early bankroller of the Royal Society, nor Sir Dalby Thomas, colonial merchant and prolific author as well as commissioner for the Million Act and Malt Act Lotteries (Thomas was also the recipient of Defoe's dedication of his *Essay Upon Projects* in 1697) has a funeral sermon extant.³¹ The same applies to Sir Joseph Herne, East India Company governor, Parliamentary Minister, and generous benefactor to Dartmouth, who paid for his own 'sumptuous funeral' in 1699 and 'substantial vault' at St Stephens, Coleman Street, where he also commissioned a wax effigy by the same artist who designed Queen Mary's.³²

This apparent lack of formal commemoration in published funeral sermons seems even more surprising when we consider how many successful merchants were also generous

Dead' : Characterisation in the Early Modern Funeral Sermon' in *Narrative Concepts in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature*, Liisa Steinby and Aino Mälikalli, eds. (Amsterdam: 2016).

³¹ Evelyn E. Cowie, 'Colwall, Daniel (d. 1690)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6014>, accessed 3 May 2016]; Perry Gauci, 'Thomas, Sir Dalby (c.1650–1711)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49984>, accessed 3 May 2016].

³² D. W. Jones, 'Herne, Sir Joseph (bap. 1639, d. 1699)', rev. Anita McConnell, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37537>, accessed 3 May 2016].

benefactors and philanthropists who played an active role in their religious communities, both within and outside the established church. David Hancock's *Citizens of the World* considers in detail the many large-scale philanthropic projects undertaken by four affluent London merchants in the second half of the eighteenth century (none of whom have published funeral sermons) while Perry Gauci further observes how early modern mercantile activity within the religious community forms just part of the wider array of international networks – religious and philanthropic, political, and even scientific - in which it was in merchants' best business interests to sustain an active profile :

Religious belief and practice helped to solidify these networks of family and friends. [...] Given their wealth and status, merchants were usually assured a prominent place within these spiritual communities, which in turn could help breed mutual respect and affability within their social and business circles. Quaker records suggest that their monthly meetings could arbitrate in disputes, or even stand for the reputation of members across the Atlantic. [...] Many merchants held lay offices, acting as churchwardens or elders of their respective churches, thereby formalizing their leadership of particular communities within the eastern City. The Church of England had increasing difficulty in coaxing overseas traders to undertake more minor offices, but a strong mercantile presence remained on the vestries of the eastern parishes.³³

³³ Gauci, p97; David Hancock, *Citizens of the World* (Cambridge: 1995). On the subject of merchants' active involvement in charitable and religious activities, see also Natasha Glaisyer, 'Networking : Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire' in *The Historical Journal* 47:2 (June 2004), 451-76.

Given the breadth of public and philanthropic activity in which merchants took part, what are we to make of the paucity of their published funeral sermons? One reason might be the overarching challenges faced by minister-authors who, in the very act of publishing funeral sermons, left themselves perennially vulnerable to accusations of mercenary conduct. This is summarised in Defoe's own satirical *Hymn to the Funeral Sermon* in which he remarks how 'Pulpit-Praises may be had/According as the Man of God is paid.'³⁴ More caustic still, in *The Hazard of a Death-Bed Repentance*, John Dunton warns

the Birth and Quality of such Men does demand our Tribute of Respect and Veneration when they live ... [but] those Ministers that Preach their Funeral Sermons are yet less excusable than other Men, if they lessen or conceal their Whoredoms.³⁵

While Dunton, here, refers specifically to the aristocracy rather than the mercantile elite, it is equally apparent that commemorating individuals whose earthly identity was inherently dedicated to profit-making would leave the presiding minister's 'Tribute of Respect and Veneration' doubly subject to such attacks. How, then, *did* ministers praise successful merchants in terms of their Christian virtues? From the handful of extant works, three merchants' funeral sermons can offer some comparative analysis with the contemporary portrait of the 'godly merchant' found elsewhere in the press. The primary focus throughout the remainder of this investigation considers how these sermons depict the character and virtues of the merchant, first, through Scriptural texts selected for exegesis in the first section,

³⁴ Daniel Defoe, *A Hymn to the Funeral Sermon* (London: 1703), p2.

³⁵ John Dunton, *The Hazard of a Death-Bed Repentance, Fairly Argued* (London: 1708), i-ii.

and secondly in the smaller, latter, section customarily dedicated to the deceased's biography and depiction of character.³⁶

What is immediately striking is that all three ministers' selection of primary Scriptural texts for exposition – as indicated on the sermons' title pages - emphasise not only wholly passive and submissive qualities of Christian conduct to be emulated by mourners and readers alike, but also in merchants' lives in general. Nathanael Waker selects Job 14:1 ('Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of trouble'); Presbyterian minister Timothy Rogers selects Book One of Corinthians 8:3 ('For the Fashion of this World passeth away') and Benjamin Colman - in colonial Boston – selects Philipians 1:10 ('That ye may be sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ'). In this last example, emphasis of passive Christian virtue is achieved through further citation of two more texts on the title page.³⁷

³⁶ This reflects the standard format for Protestant funeral sermons; on this subject see Tromly, p306 and p311; Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: 1984), pp137-8.

³⁷ Nathanael Waker, *A Sermon Preached at the Funerall of Mr. Lucas Lucie, Merchant* [...] (London: 1664); Timothy Rogers, *The Changableness [sic] of this World. With Respect to Nations, Families, and particular Persons* (London: 1692); Benjamin Colman, *A Blameless and Inoffensive Life [...] Preached on the Lord's Day after the funeral of the Virtuous and Exemplary Mr. David Stoddard of Boston, Merchant* (Boston: 1723). Colman also cites from the first and third Epistles of John on the title page of Stoddard's funeral sermon.

All three ministers go on to deploy *some* aspect of their deceased subjects' profession in their discourse, whether in metaphorical terms or otherwise. Waker offers an accounting analogy early on to demonstrate the paucity and ephemeral nature of man's earthly state:

when we have adjusted all of his accounts, the total sum at the foot will amount to no more than a few broken figures, and a long row of Ciphers, which signifie nothing to his advantage, but only serve to augment his woes.³⁸

Later, more epigrammatically, Waker reflects upon the speed with which death comes for the spiritually unprepared: 'he who has a great debt to pay at Easter thinks the Lent to be very short'.³⁹ Waker's intentions here, however, are not to imply mercenary characteristics in Lucas Lucie, his deceased subject; Lucie is vividly praised in the second section of the sermon, both in general Christian terms as a 'good Neighbour, and a faithful Friend, and a loving Master, and an Honest Man, and a steddy Christian', *and* as a virtuous Christian Merchant:

[I]n relation to his Equals, and those with whom he had commerce (and they were not a few) he approv'd himself a Punctual and Just man ... He did not build his house upon the ruins of others, nor fill it when he had done with plunder'd goods; He did not

³⁸ Waker, p4.

³⁹ Ibid, p34.

drink the tears of Orphans, nor feast upon the grones of Widows ... he did not break Artificially to cheat his Creditors, and fill his own purse [...]⁴⁰

Waker's commemoration is almost wholly defined by Lucie's passive virtues – *not* cheating his creditors, *not* profiting by others' loss – as if to suggest that Waker was reluctant to elaborate on Lucie's more active mercantile virtues. This was not a minister who was likely to 'damn with faint praise'; elsewhere Waker is noticeably vociferous in making known his High Church views. His prefatory dedication of this sermon to Lucie's brother Jacob openly alludes to heated differences with certain members of his congregation, while his concluding pages roundly condemn the antimonarchists who – unlike the deceased subject – neglected, in 1644, the admonition in Hebrews 13:7 to 'obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves' in favour of 'rapine and murder'.⁴¹ Yet this same minister is notably cautious to praise his subject in terms associated with the active *getting* of earthly profit.

Waker is not alone in openly voicing his political alliances in a funeral sermon while sustaining a certain reluctance to elaborate on the active mercantile success, or even other active virtues, of his deceased subject. Twenty-eight years later, Presbyterian minister Timothy Rogers wastes no time in offering full-blooded praise to God and English seamen for valiant battle over the French (in June 1692) in his Epistle Dedicatory to the deceased's brother John:

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp36-7

⁴¹ Ibid, p39.

And so we are now called by the late Victory that God gave our Fleet over the French at Sea; we adore him for inspiring our Admirals and our Seamen with Courage and Resolution, and for that eminent Success that he gave them in the day of Battle, wherein so many of our Enemies, and of their biggest Ships, sunk like Lead in the mighty Waters. And we hope, that as the Divine Providence has by this means began the Ruine of that great Enemy of Mankind, so it will entirely finish it [...] ⁴²

These seem incongruously robust and political allusions, given his *principal* theme - the ephemeral nature of this world – in this funeral sermon for merchant Edmund Hill, who died very young (though notably successful) after a prolonged illness. Hill is not openly identified as a merchant on the title page, but the profession is implicit at several stages in the funeral sermon, as when Rogers dedicates the concluding section to other young persons, admonishing them with the image of those who die wealthy, but too soon to save their eternal souls:

Though their Lands are now called after their own Names, and though they gave Rise to those Families who flourish ... which their Industry and Money purchased ... indeed their Greatness and Riches could only procure a more pompous Funeral ... and a more costly place to lie in. ⁴³

⁴² Rogers, op. cit., Epistle Dedicatory.

⁴³ Ibid, pp97-99.

Despite these admonitions concerning ‘other’ deceased wealthy men, Rogers depicts his particular subject in far more positive, though again largely passive, terms. Although Rogers does acknowledge some moments of mercantile bustle in Hill’s past life (when he ‘used to walk the Streets in a hurry after Business’ and was ‘active in his calling and managing of Trade and Business but a few months ago’, he also offers at length a threefold categorisation of Hill’s Christian virtues which underscore the deceased’s passivity, meekness, and patient resignation to his fate. These are comprised by his sweetness of temper, with pleasant conversation, affableness, meekness, and sincerity; his being serviceable and charitable, ‘though he was not forward to proclaim his charities’, with ‘no stingy narrow Soul’; and finally submission in his long affliction, with great patience and resignation, taking - Rogers remarks – ‘as much satisfaction on his sick-bed as in his warehouse, because it was the will of God.’⁴⁴

The extent of Hill’s resignation to his physical deterioration might seem incongruous in one so recently ‘active in his calling and managing of Trade’, but it is also a characteristic which Rogers finds particularly worthy of note, since he has already made allusion to it as early as the Epistle Dedicatory, when he remarks how

It is therefore the Wisdom and the Love of God to his Servants, that he sends them various Afflictions, to wean them from so vain a state [...], his Wisdom that prepares the Cross, and his Love that teaches them to bear it.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp106-111.

⁴⁵ Ibid, Epistle Dedicatory.

Patient submission to God's will is a Christian virtue worthy of emulation, but even more so in a twenty-four year-old whose brief adult life had already witnessed material success. What both the commemorations by Rogers and Waker lack is any proportional recognition of the active Christian virtues found elsewhere in contemporary literary portraits of idealised merchants. This lack is highlighted differently, indeed problematically, by the third example to be considered here, the 1723 funeral sermon for David Stoddard (a Boston merchant who died at the age of 37), in which minister Benjamin Colman *does* initially acknowledge the deceased's 'diligent and active' virtues before unreservedly dedicating the remainder of his character portrait to Stoddard's inoffensive passivity, as per the sermon's primary Scriptural motif:

His short and inoffensive (and yet diligent and active) life, is a loud and earnest Sermon upon my text. [...] If he that offendeth not in a word is a perfect man indeed, must not the DECEASED appear to us? How lovely and endearing was he in his domestic relations? How just, righteous and faithful, in his dealings and in his Trusts! How courteous and grateful to his friends? Ready to oblige, and easily obliged! How pure from the world, it's [sic] passions frauds and lusts!

Who has there been among us ... more sincere and without offence ... more harmless and without rebuke? Doing all things without murmuring and disputings in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation ... We are witnesses how modestly, meekly, justly, and unblameably he behaved himself among us ... Whom did the Deceased ever

speaking evil of? Or when did he backbite with his tongue? Or do evil against his neighbour?⁴⁶

Colman's extended list of rhetorical questions emphasise the deceased's passivity and inoffensiveness to the extent that his brief initial reference to Stoddard's 'diligent and active life' is negated by them. Indeed, here the possibility of 'damning with faint praise', or at least mildly rebuking with faint praise, is readily present since Stoddard's seemingly utter passivity in life obliges Colman to defend the deceased's conduct in terms which border on the defensive in tone:

It may be the more active lives of some others may be more praise-worthy; more worthy to be esteemed, admired and imitated by us, more fruitful to the glory of God and the benefit of men than this more silent and retir'd temper. It may be that there are some good men in the Town, as inoffensive, and yet more active in doing good than the Deceased : GOD increase their number! Who being equally harmless yet may be more filled with the fruits of righteousness.⁴⁷

The equation of active virtues with God's greater glory is mooted here, thereby casting some shadow on the blameless but utterly passive qualities of the deceased merchant Stoddard.

There are, however, also some notable caveats to consider here. Vitally, Colman qualifies that any 'good men in the Town' who are 'more active in doing good than the Deceased'

⁴⁶ Colman, pp31-32.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p33.

must also be assessed by the criteria of maintaining passive inoffensiveness, as upheld by the deceased, as well as being 'equally harmless'. Colman's carefully graduated speculations suggest that more active lives *may* be more praise-worthy, though not merely by virtue of being active. Finally, the 'good men in the Town' – those more active than Stoddard – are just that – men in the Town, not necessarily other merchants. At the very least, Colman's conclusive opinion of the deceased's character and conduct appears to be compromised by a determined effort to foreground the passivity of his deceased mercantile subject when alive, notwithstanding the brief opening reference to Stoddard's active and diligent qualities.

Colman's disproportionately high estimation of passive Christian virtues in his subject, the deceased merchant David Stoddard, echoes certain tendencies of characterisation also apparent in the funeral sermons by Waker and Rogers, despite its later date, its colonial provenance, and its conditional acknowledgement of potentially 'fruitful' active Christian virtues in the population at large 'in the Town'. All three ministers present a lopsided portrait of the early modern merchant, overwhelmingly favouring the passive Christian virtues of their deceased subjects. This suggests the published funeral sermon presents a category of public commemoration in print unlike other contemporary portraits of merchants, whether idealised, fictional, or autobiographical. This even seems to be the case whether ministers celebrate, or castigate, active and diligent conduct in other realms of endeavour (including naval warfare, spiritual integrity, or the efforts of 'good men in the Town'). If this observation allows us to conclude little more than, ultimately, ministers *decline* to tell us the 'whole story' when commemorating deceased merchants in published funeral sermons, it simultaneously reveals new facets of the morally complex, profit-driven, and publicly-censured print culture in which such ministers participated.